

Comparative Analysis of the Controversies among the Orientalist about the Epilepsy Imputed to the Holy Prophet.

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ABSTRACT

The opponents of Islām and its prophet, Muhammad (ﷺ) including some of the orientalist, have always tried their best to distort the real image of Islām and malign the person of the holy Prophet. They have produced many baseless stories and notions about the teachings of Islām and the person and life of the holy Prophet. They accused the Prophet (ﷺ) of having compiled the Qur'ān out of the teachings of Christianity, Judaism and the customs of pre-Muhammadan Arabs. They maintain that Muḥammad (ﷺ) was caught by epilepsy and trances, out of which he pretended to having received the Quranic revelation. They mention the incident of 'Shaq al-Ṣadr' (splitting up of the bosom of the prophet in his childhood) and the shivering condition of the holy Prophet(ﷺ)while receiving the revelations as hallucination of epileptic fits. But the history, medical science, the logical reasoning and the impartial orientalist have absolutely rejected their biased allegations on the personality of the holy Prophet. They certified that Muḥammad (ﷺ)had never suffered from any type of such ailment like epileptic fits, seizers, trances or the falling sickness.

The author in this paper refutes the allegation of epilepsy to the prophet with the help of impartial studies of the orientalist and evidences from the medical science, thus, highlighted the superficiality of the investigations of some orientalist about Islām and Its Prophet.

Keywords: *Muḥammad, Epilepsy, Quranic Revelation, Medical science, Impartial Orientalists.*

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Introduction:

The believers as well as the non-believers of Islām and the holy prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) are not unaware of the fact that the character of the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) played very effective role in proselytizing the new faith in masses and the conversion of non-believers to Islām. In spite of this awareness, they tried their best to malign and tarnish the fair reputation of Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ). They also endeavored to sidetrack the divine message and depicted it as if it was not coming from the Almighty Allāh, but was the result of the imaginative brain of its promoter. Main reason for the bitter attacks of the Western priests and the orientalist on the person of the prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) have been for several centuries their stupendous ignorance and inherited bias against Islām and its Prophet about which the modern writers, even of the Western World, are not only aware but also condemn this attitude. The reverend American author, S.P. Scott ⁽¹⁾ Celebrated Sydney Cave, ⁽²⁾ and several other orientalist open heartedly expressed their sympathies with the Prophet and have criticized the immoral enmity of the West with Muḥammad (ﷺ)

One of the allegations, imputed to the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) was that he was a victim of epilepsy. He took advantage thence and pretended to receiving the revelation of the Divine verses and then, he compiled them as the Qur'ān. We shall endure to refute this accusation by the following types of approaches.

- First of all by the witness of the history available to us, so far, on the life of the Holy Prophet.
- By the contrast opinions of some upright orientalist.
- By the witness of medical science provided by the Western Medical Scholars.
- Logic will also be an effective device in this regard.

The Prophet's Alleged Epilepsy and the Orientalists:

the orientalist are not ready to acknowledge Muḥammad (ﷺ) as the last Prophet and his message as divine as those of the earlier Prophets, it is why, no efforts have been spared by them to

represent his Divine Message as mere invention of his mind. The holy Prophet's trembling because of Divine grandeur, while the Divine revelation being descended upon him, particularly, in the earlier period of his prophethood, and his state of being intimidated, have been given the name of epilepsy by the orientalists. They tried to give the impression that the holy Prophet pretended to receiving the revelation to conceal his epileptic fits. By now, we quote some of the contrast opinions of orientalists, witnesses of history, medical sciences and logic on this controversial issue and try to fix it.

William Muir, a noted biographer of the holy Prophet, is of the view that Muḥammad (ﷺ) was caught by the illness since his childhood. He notes that the miraculous event, as asserted by the Muslim historians, of cutting open of Muḥammad (ﷺ) chest in his childhood was a fit of epilepsy. He writes:

“When another two years were ended, some strong events occurred which greatly alarmed his nurse. It was probably a fit of epilepsy.”⁽³⁾

He cites further:

“At times, we are told, the distress was so great as even to suggest escape suicide...the excitement took the shape of a trance or vision...Some early Christian writers have described them as epileptic seizures, “The descent of inspiration,” even in later life.”⁽⁴⁾

According to Muir, Muḥammad's nurse was greatly alarmed by the strong events of his epileptic fits. And sometimes, the distress because of these fits was so great as even to suggest escape suicide.

On another place, as has been mentioned ahead in the 10th reference of this paper, he claims that Muḥammad (ﷺ) never but once had suffered from any serious illness until the 3rd month of the 11th hijrah. It provokes the question that it was not a severe illness of seizures during the descent of inspiration to get rid of which He thought of committing suicide? Actually Muir's statements contradict each other because he is not sure about the severeness of that disease.

He remarks on the revelation of 'Aisha's acquittance from the accusation of fornication in these words:

“Mahomet did not speak. As they sat in silence he appeared to fall into a trance... “Rejoice, O Ayesha! For the lord hath declared thine innocence.” ⁽⁵⁾

Though he did not use the word of ‘falling’ for Muḥammad(ﷺ) yet, he has given the very impression that he fell down senselessly and was covered by his relatives.

It has been the phenomenon of the Western investigations and writings about the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) that they create some new events of their own and often mention them in their works without any reference to their origins. In the following pages, we see it mandatory to quote some more of such examples from the writings of orientalist about the alleged epilepsy of the holy Prophet.

Washington Irving, an orientalist of a good repute, goes ahead and writes down somewhat fabricated information about the early revelation of the holy Prophet. He remarks:

“Often He would lose all consciousness of surrounding objects, and lie upon the ground as if insensible. Khadija, be held these paroxysms with anxious solicitude, and entreated to know the cause;... Some of his adversaries attributed them to epilepsy”. ⁽⁶⁾

Washington Irving has written no reference of this account because neither any traditionist has written nor any historian reported any of such wordings. Two parts of Irving’s statement; ‘*Khadija, who was sometimes the faithful companion of his solitude and ‘be held these paroxysms with anxious solicitude, and entreated to know the cause’* contradict not only the historical records, but are incompatible with each other too.

Keeping aside the fabrication of Muḥammad’s ‘lying upon the ground’ for a while, we try here to search the origin for Khadija’s entreating to knowing the cause of Prophet’s paroxysms and his evading Khadija’s inquiries.

This news presented by Washington Irving seems quite illogical and falls in contrast with the history of Prophet’s life. It is why, Washington is alone in presenting it and would be considered a forgery produced by him. Because the holy Prophet had told Khadija about his anxiety on the occasions of the early revelations, and Khadija knew it well from the early days of his Prophetic life,

believed his message truly Divine, and had never asked him in such a skeptic way, because had she any suspicion on his revelation, she would have denied his teachings and refused to embrace Islām. But the fact is on the contrast, Khadija always consoled him, trusted in him and supported his cause until her last breath. As Washington Irving himself, on another occasion, describes Khadija's state of mind about the Prophet's revelation. He states:

“Cadajah, however, saw everything with the eye of faith, and the credulity of an affectionate woman. She saw in it the fruition of her husband's wishes, and the end of his paroxysms and privations.”⁽⁷⁾

It is unacceptable dishonesty, on the part of Washington, for every reader who is in search of true historical facts that a historian, like him, gives a statement at one point, and two pages later, he himself refutes his previous notion by noting: *“Cadajah, however, saw everything with the eye of faith, and the credulity of an affectionate woman... ”*. As a result, Irving's all three statements contradict one another, which is not less than a big wonder to see that how a noted scholar can commit such a gross mistake to assert three statements on a single issue none of which is compatible with the other ones.

Therefore, though William Muir is as active in creating new and absurd inventions as Washington Irving does, yet his narration of the same discourse is better than Irving's baseless assumption:

“Never, replied his faithful wife; ‘The Lord will never suffer it thus to be, and she went on to speak of his many virtues, upon which she found the assurance.’⁽⁸⁾

Here the statements of Muir and Washington Irving contradict each other. In this situation, we are left helpless in the deep well of vacillation and indecisiveness and are unable to determine that which of these is correct and which is unable to be confirmed in the bar of history. This contradiction is a sufficient proof to refute them, at least, to ignore them because they themselves have decreased the weight of each other.

According to Muir, Muḥammad(ﷺ) was caught by the falling sickness since his childhood, and made the pretense thence that he received the inspirations in that way up to the last days of his life. He produces the following notion:

“At the moment of inspiration (So the tradition runs) anxiety pressed upon the Prophet,...and he would fall to the ground as in a trance. “Inspiration, he would say, ‘cometh to me in one of two ways...In later life he would point to his grey hairs, and say that they were the withering effect of the early terrific suras. (9)

But on another occasion, he himself admits that Muḥammad(ρ), throughout his life, had to face no severe disease except once before the 11th hijrah. He describes:

“It was the beginning of the 3rd month of the 11th hegira that Mahomet fell sick. He never but once had suffered from any serious illness. A few years previously he was seized with an attack which caused him to pine away, and even to neglect his wives. The cause, we are told, was certain incantations of the Jews over knots his hair sunk in a well; but the spell was discovered...The poisoned shoulder of mutton of which he partook at Kheiber was followed by effects more potent and more lasting.” (10)

The context of this statement gives the impression that Muḥammad (ρ)suffered from no type of serious illness except at three times. The earliest time, as described by him, when Muḥammad(ρ)suffered from some disease was the battle of Khyber in the seventh year of Hijrah. In this way, he discards and denies any sort of severe sickness before the seventh Hijrah. And according to him, the number of diseases suffered by Muḥammad (ρ)is not more than three. We are astonished to see the superficiality in Muir’s research about the personality of Prophet Muḥammad(ρ)He has reported Muḥammad(ρ)having been caught by epileptic fits at several times, other than these three, but here he denies his own writings by saying that Muḥammad (ρ) suffered from no serious illness other than those as mentioned earlier. The question emerges here that do his words ‘some strong events occurred which greatly alarmed his nurse, It was probably a fit of epilepsy’ and ‘at times the distress was so great as even to suggest escape suicide’ not indicate

to any seriousness in the diseases of Muḥammad (ﷺ) because of which Ḥalīma was greatly alarmed and which took Him close to the stage of suicide? The fact is that Muir is confused on this issue at many times and could conclude nothing but the murder of history.

Washington Irving quotes Dr. Gustav Weil's advanced discovery in which he describes the Holy Prophet foaming and bellowing like a Camel.⁽¹¹⁾

Dr. Henry Stubbe notes the attitude of Romans towards the holy Prophet in these lines:

“The Roman speaks of him on the day of marriage he has an attack of epilepsy, which he explains away as a visit from the Archangel. He deceives the barons by false miracles.”⁽¹²⁾

The authenticity of history demands the historical continuation of attestation in which each event should be confirmed and imparted by the eye witnesses or the contemporaries of that time. On the contrary, it has been the tragedy of the Western works on Islām, in particular on Muḥammad(ﷺ), that their producers distort the Islamic history by introducing the new ideas and creating the baseless events having been given no reference to any of the historical source. Here the same case is represented. These were the Romans only who discovered Muḥammad (ﷺ) having been attacked by epilepsy on the day of his marriage. Even the majority of the Western biographers of the Prophet have given no indication to any of such happening on the occasion of Prophet's marriage. Muir and Washington Irving have also given no reference to any of the contemporary origin of their claims. While, whole history, written by the Muslims or the Christians, Arabian or non-Arabian, from the birth of the holy Prophet till the twelfth century, gives no clue to any of such fabulous story of his epilepsy.

At first it was early in the twelfth century when a report spread that Muḥammad (ﷺ) was punished by the Almighty by being attacked by epilepsy. Dr. Henry Stubbe describes the baselessness of the Christians' fabrication against Muḥammad (ﷺ) and denies it because of a technical weakness in it. According to him, the history says no to confirm this allegation. He states:

“The reason that hinders me from believing this story of Mahomet’s fits is that I find no account of this matter in the Arabian writers, tho’ Christian.” ⁽¹³⁾

He moves further and considers such calumnies incompatible with one another. He argues:

“They tell us he was troubled with the falling sickness...I have already refuted this story, it not being mentioned among the Arabians nor do they magnify their prophet for any such extatic raptures.” ⁽¹⁴⁾

Edward Gibbon calls it the result of the hatred of Muḥammad’s enemies and appreciates the way adopted by the Muslims to ignore it. He opines:

“The epilepsy, or the falling sickness of Moḥammad, is asserted by the Theophanes, Zonaras, and the rest of the Greeks; the ignorance of the Mohammdan commentators, is more conclusive than the most peremptory denial.” ⁽¹⁵⁾

The traditional activity of creating fabulous insertions has been repeated by the orientalists as mentioned in the previous pages. We have seen that none of the orientalists, including William Muir, Washington Irving, Dr. Gustave Veil, and the Romans, could give any of the reference to their claims about the holy Prophet’s disease. This unveils the fact that they could find, neither in the basic nor in the secondary sources of the Sīrah or Ḥadīth literature, any mention of their discovery of Muḥammad’s epilepsy. All of this is because even no historic source has ever spoken about the existence of such sickness in the holy Prophet. It is the major reason that in most cases the creators of fantastic events seem all alone with their novel productions and their inventions have been refuted by their fellow orientalists. Though all the assertions made by the orientalists about the Prophet’s grandmal have been discarded earlier. Yet, we would like to discuss and examine all the symptoms of the Prophet’s epilepsy presented by them in the light of medical science.

Comparison between the Symptoms of Epilepsy Described by the Orientalists and the Medical Science.

Previous statements of orientalists show that they have made the following physical conditions of the holy Prophet as the basic symptoms for their claim of Muḥammad’s supposed epilepsy.

- Falling upon the ground in a trance.

- At times, the distress was so great as even to suggest escape suicide.
- Anxiety pressed upon the Prophet.
- He was seized, with violent trembling followed by swoons, Paroxysms and convulsion.
- His countenance became troubled.
- Sweat dropped from his forehead.
- Revelation burdened the Prophet.
- He lost consciousness of surrounding objects as if
Insensible, eyes closed, foaming from mouth and bellowing like a camel.

Having refuted historically the allegation of epilepsy on the person of the holy Prophet made by the orientalist, in the coming lines, we shall see either the symptoms of epilepsy mentioned by them are compatible with those which have been described by the medical scientists, or are they a sufficient proof to prove Muḥammad (ﷺ) a sufferer of epilepsy? The question will also be put that did they affect their bearer just like those put forth by the men of science or they neither combine with them nor they damage the muscular system of the patient?

Symptoms that Stand for Epilepsy According to the Medical Science.

1. Grandmal is characterized by the occurrence of convulsive fits.
2. In many cases preliminary sensation or aura which warns the victim of what is going to happen.
3. Sensation of heat or cold in limbs or face.
4. Flashes of light before the eyes.
5. Voices in the ears.
6. Or uneasy sensations in the stomach.
7. After an interval of varying duration the patient suddenly loses the consciousness and falls to the ground without making any effort to save himself.
8. Sometimes the beginning of the fit is marked by a loud cry.
9. Suspension of respiration causes blueness of the face.
10. The limbs are jerked about, muscles of the face twitch and tongue may be severely bitten.

11. After one or two minutes the patient passes into a state of somnolence which may be succeeded by prolonged sleep.
12. In several cases fits may rapidly follow each other, and consciousness may not be regained in the intervals.
13. In epilepsy the fits are replaced by attacks of delirium or outburst of maniacal fury during which the sufferer may commit crimes of brutal violence or destroy himself.⁽¹⁶⁾
14. Encyclopedia of Britannica and the Symptoms of Epilepsy.
15. Epilepsy denotes a chronic clinical disorder or syndrome characterized by paroxysmal attacks or fits.
16. With the loss of consciousness there may be sharp loud cry.
17. Victim may fall to the ground forcibly; as the tongue is protruded between the gnashing teeth, it may be bitten.
18. Pupils dilate and the eyeballs roll upward or to one side.
19. The face first becomes pale, but when breathing is suspended by closing of glottis and spastic fixation of the respiratory muscles, it becomes livid or purplish in colour.
20. After 20 to 30 seconds this phase of seizures ends more or less abruptly, and the second or clonic phase immediately supervenes. The latter is characterized by violent though rhythmic jerking spasms which involve the entire muscular systems, usually lasting from 30 to more than 100 seconds. During this period the breathing becomes deep and stertorous and foamy saliva (often blood stained) issues from the mouth.
21. In unusual severe attacks, control of rectum and bladder may be lost, resulting faecal and urinary incontinence. Following this phase, the patient regains consciousness for a short time, but because of sheer exhaustion is prone to lapse into a deep sleep which may last for one hour or more.⁽¹⁷⁾

Comparison:

We have seen that the conditions mentioned by orientalists hardly apparently match a few of which have been pointed out by the medical science but they are a superficial and imperfect glimpse of those mentioned by physical scientists and bear the following shortcomings.

- None of them could find any mention of its origin in the historical literature, either Arabic or Non-Arabic, Muslim or Non-Muslim. On the contrary, they lack in number and do not suffice for the proof of epilepsy because there are a lot of other medical signs of grandmal which exist in a

patient of epilepsy from which the patient cannot escape. But they have not been described by the orientalists.

- They describe less severity, rigidity and strictness than those which exist in those of medical science.

Here, we see it pertinent to indicate briefly the medical symptoms of epilepsy, which are the part and parcel of a patient's life and have not been mentioned even by the orientalists and other bitterest enemies of the Prophet of Islām about him. It will also be analyzed, historically as well as scientifically, that had the holy Prophet ever been the sufferer of these attacks pointed out by the physical science? If not, the question arises thence that how can a person be called the patient of epilepsy without having suffered these signs? Let us have a start of the analysis:

- Flashes of light in the eyes, as the science describes, have neither been seen nor been felt by the holy prophet ever.
- The holy Prophet never felt uneasy sensations in the stomach.
- Holy Prophet did never cry slightly or loudly, in the beginning, middle or the end of the revelation period. The orientalists, in their statements, have also not mentioned him crying at the time of his fits.
- Physical science notes that patient's muscles of the face twitch and tongue may be severely bitten. But neither had it happened with the Holy prophet nor did any of the historian mention it.
- Medical experts say that the ending fits may be succeeded by prolonged sleep or maniacal fury during which the sufferer may commit crimes of brutal violence or destroy himself. Did the Holy Prophet sleep just after the revelation at any occasion without dictating the revealed verses or sūrahs to the then audience? Or did he harm himself or anyone else at any time after receiving the revelation? The orientalists have no positive answer in this regard. On the other hand, the holy Prophet used to recite the revealed parts of the holy Qur'ān and directed his followers, in a normal Prophetic behavior, to preserve it through writing, learning it by heart and imparting it to others.
- Men of physical sciences assert that during the seizures, pupils of the patient dilate and the eyeballs roll upward or

to one side. This is the extreme condition of a patient which seems the most fatal for the life of the patient and horribly unseeable for those who are with the sufferer of epilepsy. How is it possible that the man, who had to be the most talked about figure in history, suffered such a severe condition at various times in his life and the eye witnesses say nothing like this about him?

- According to the medical specialists, in some cases during the period of seizures breathing becomes deep and stertorous and foamy saliva (often bloodstained) issues from the mouth. 'Foaming from mouth and bellowing like a Camel' has been pointed out by the orientalism, though without reference, but they never said that foamy saliva (often blood stained) issued from Muḥammad's mouth.

Now, keeping aside all the historical facts and ground realities that deny the epilepsy, we suppose, for a while, that Muḥammad (ﷺ) was a victim of epilepsy, as described by the orientalist, and suffered all the dreadful and fatal attacks, seizures and the falling on the ground in senselessness. But the question arises here with this supposition, that is there any other instance of a single sufferer of epilepsy in the human history who, in spite of his epileptic fits, changed the whole of his superstitious society into a community based on solid ethical values, diminished all type of crimes, and established an exemplary peaceful community out of the professional warriors? In fact, history confirms that no sufferer of epilepsy could do such revolutionary historic things except Muḥammad (ﷺ) It is why, He has been acknowledged not only by the Muslims, but also by his detractors, as the most influential personality of the human history, who gave such a useful and everlasting code of social, political and religious principles of life, which have been universally accepted and adopted by the mankind. Alfred Guillaume.⁽¹⁸⁾ William Muir.⁽¹⁹⁾ S.P. Scott.⁽²⁰⁾ James A. Montgomery.⁽²¹⁾ Will Durant.⁽²²⁾ G.M. Draycott,⁽²³⁾ Thomas Carlyle⁽²⁴⁾ and many others (mention of whom will take this small article to hundreds of pages) pronounce him as a successful intellectual Prophet and a social reformer. They all have expressed their historic acknowledgements to his intellectual qualities. The comments of only a few of them about the brilliant intellect and wisdom of the holy Prophet can be mentioned here which will prove

that such an extraordinary theological revolution cannot be an outcome of a patient of a disease like epilepsy. Washington Irving praises his moral, spiritual and intellectual qualities in these lines:

“He eminently possessed the intellectual attributes of the shemitic race, penetrating sagacity, subtle wit, a ready conception, and a brilliant imagination. His sensibilities were quick and acute”⁽²⁵⁾

All of such capabilities can spring from an active, innovative and healthy brain. While epilepsy is a chronic clinical disorder that destroys the efficiency of the muscular system of patient’s body and brain. It makes its sufferer a permanent patient of mental depression and physical weakness. His limbs and potentialities work less effectively than those of a healthy person. This is why, the orientalist have also discarded this accusation of epilepsy, because it has no medical or logical basis. Bodley denies epilepsy in a person having such a strong character like Muḥammad (ﷺ). He remarks:

“Every word of the Koran was dictated clear headedly... Any medical man will confirm that an epileptic does not come out of his fit with lucid thoughts. Neither is such a one in the final physical health which Mohammad enjoyed until a week before he died...If ever there was a man who was clearly sane, it was Mohammad.”⁽²⁶⁾

Orientalists believe that Muḥammad (SAW) remained in sound health until the last days of his life. According to Montgomery Watt, epilepsy bears no medical ground for its confirmation.⁽²⁷⁾

Gibbon also speaks of his sound physical health throughout his life in the following words:

“Till the age of sixty three years the strength of Mohammad was equal to the temporal and spiritual fatigues of his mission. His epileptic fits, an absurd calumny of the Greeks, would be an object of pity rather than abhorrence.”⁽²⁸⁾

He opines that he said prayers till the third last day of His life⁽²⁹⁾

Conclusion:

It can be concluded in the light of previous discussions that the absurdity and baselessness of the orientalist’s charge of epilepsy,

ascribed to the holy Prophet, confirmed by the history, physical science and the logic, has confused its producers and compelled other learned orientalists to refute and discard it at all. Contradictions among orientalists on this accusation also unveiled the superficiality of the investigations of the orientalists on Islām.

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